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ABSTRACT

Since evaluations have shown that organizational development is a plausible and useful vehicle for improving school climate, it needs to be extended in various ways, including (1) further scientific study of organizational development in schools; (2) more research into the processes and effects of organizational development training; and (3) extension of philosophic models to include power and conflict, accountability and responsibility, and techno-structural aspects of the school. Most important is the effort to bring parents, students, and educators into joint decisionmaking around educational alternatives. (Author/RA)

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Where OD for Schools Needs to Go*

by

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Since many of you may not know what OD is, I wish to begin by defining it. First of all, OD stands for organization development. Matt Miles and I have defined it as a planned and sustained effort to apply behavioral science for system improvement, using reflexive, self-analytic methods.

There are four key phrases in this definition which I'd like to spell out in more detail; for example:

System Improvement. The target of an OD intervention is a social system or some part of it, rather than the individual. Thus, OD differs from "sensitivity training" and "management development," both of which are focused on modifying individuals.

Using reflexive, self-analytic methods means that OD involves the system members themselves in assessment, diagnosis, and transformation of their own organization. In other words, OD helps system members to solve their own problems.

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EA 004 191

A planned and sustained effort is important because available evidence suggests that one to three years of a deliberately planned OD effort is typical before the completion of serious and self-sustaining change.

And finally, OD relies strongly on concepts from the behavioral sciences, primarily social psychology but also psychology and sociology. Such concepts are used to diagnose an organization's problems, to equip the organization's members with a conceptual language, to redesign unsatisfactory structures and procedures, and to provide a basis for evaluating OD interventions and processes.

In this presentation, I will not have time to speak about how OD works in schools or what the particular effects have been of applying it to schools. Let it suffice to say that OD, as applied to school organizations, has been successful. It has only just begun, however, and is very immature. Although the evidence to date indicates that it is a plausible and useful vehicle for humanizing staff and classroom climates, the research and development on it is less than ten years old. For the next few minutes I want to look to the future and to specify some directions I think OD in schools should take.

It seems to me that OD practitioners should attend especially to four aspects of work during the next several years. These four are: (1) Extending and refining the science-base of OD in schools; (2) Extending and refining the basic philosophical models that underly OD in schools; (3) Extending the types of clientele that are included in OD projects, and (4) Developing more OD consultants that are inside school districts.

The Science-Base.

During the last decade, only a handfull of OD projects have been adequately evaluated. OD consultants seldom collect data to test their theory of organizational change, to evaluate outcomes after their intervention, or to compare what occurs in an OD-influenced school with other schools receiving different inputs. Unfortunately, the "disinterested research function" has seldom been included in school OD projects. An important need for the future is for more complete and formal research on OD interventions in schools.

Along similar lines, OD practitioners should become much more explicit than they are now about the theory that guides their interventions and their technology. Detailed descriptions of both theory and technology, as well as the links between them, are needed so that other less experienced consultants can use OD, so that experimental replications can be carried out, and so that creative adaptations can be made for future designs. These needs are highly demanding, especially if this new domain of planned change is to meet its claim to be science-based.

Philosophical Models.

Most of the initial efforts to apply OD to schools have been guided by a set of assumptions involving trust and truth. This model states that shared expectations involving trust, warmth, and supportiveness are formed as the members of a working team gain confidence and skill in communicating clearly and openly. These norms and skills, in turn, support collaborative problem-solving and the rational use of

information. The model assumes that the work of schools is carried out through interpersonal interactions and that heightening abilities for problem solving must commence with new norms for interpersonal openness and helpfulness.

Although this so-called "tender" model certainly has paid off, efforts should be made to develop and test OD interventions guided by other philosophical orientations. I have three in mind:

First, the power-conflict model. Although conflict is often surfaced and used in the trust-truth model, it has not been employed deliberately as a lever for change. More research and development should be done on the effects of deliberately bringing conflict into the open; on training groups to fight for their interests; and on building new norms, organizational power structures, and procedures through bargaining and negotiation.

A second model, one oriented toward accountability and responsibility is based on the assumption that schools can and should be held accountable for their performance. OD work could commence by collecting data on such aspects as the reading performances or other achievements of students, students' job performance after graduation, their attitudes toward future learning, tendencies toward "pro-activeness" as opposed to passivity; also creativity, collaborative skills, and other similar items. These data would be fed back to students, teachers, administrators, and parents as leverage points for heightening tension and interest, inducing increased communication accross roles, and stimulating redesign of the school environment.

The current interest in installing various types of Pro-

gramming, Planning, Budgeting Systems (PPBS) could be joined with OD to put the accountability model to work.

A third model, referred to as the techno-structural orientation, specifies that action for organizational change should focus upon altering the organization's physical arrangements, its work structures or work-flow patterns, and its means for accomplishing tasks. This approach might include changes in the design or utilization of buildings; changes through alterations in scheduling, flow of students, and groupings of students; and changes through new types of staffing patterns, such as differentiated staffing and teaching structures like the multi-unit school organization.

The Clientele.

Whatever model or combination of them is used, more OD projects should be tried in which students and parents are included as trainees along with the professional educators.

There are mounting pressures these days, especially in big city schools, to decentralize decision-making and to develop more educational alternatives. In particular, pressure is great for increasing the educational decision-making responsibilities of parents and students. Little knowledge exists right now concerning the most appropriate procedures for involving parents and students, nor has much of a technology been developed on how to train them so that they can participate effectively with professionals in making educational decisions. We need a program of R & D that will generate ways of building organizational structures through

which parents, students, and educators can, much more easily and effectively than is now typical, enter into collaborative decision making about educational matters.

Several assumptions underlie the desirability of opening schools to the influences of students, parents, and educators: (1) Schools must respond to the voices of all their clientele if current conflicts are not to rage out of control; (2) Some activist groups are trying to destroy schools and some educators react to the threats in defensive and reactionary ways. These reactions do not help matters; (3) Professional personnel now in the schools can learn to accept and work with organizational and curricular innovation, even to the extent of sharing power with students and parents; and (4) Current OD theory and technology can be adapted to help educators, students, and parents learn new ways of working together, even when conflict is very high, to make productive changes in school organizations.

Phil Runkel and I currently are preparing a proposal for such a program of R & D at CASEA.

Internal OD Consultants.

More projects deliberately designed to establish groups of skilled OD trainers in school districts are needed. Highly developed theories and technologies will have little viable impact unless they can be used on a continuous basis by local OD specialists. Assuming that it is feasible to install such groups in many districts, I believe that each district's cadre of specialists will gain legitimacy

d influence as it is formally and regionally linked to other similar groups. Institutions oriented to improvement in schools, such as regional educational laboratories, state and county departments of education, and commercial agencies, could coordinate the district groups and periodically arrange for advanced training sessions to refurbish them.

Summary.

In summary, although OD for schools is a plausible and useful vehicle for improving school climates, it needs to be extended in various ways. More emphasis should be placed on the scientific study of OD in schools; future projects should make use especially of more objective and precise methods to study the processes and effects of OD training more penetratingly. Moreover, the philosophical models that undergird OD training should be extended beyond current empahsis on trust and truth to include emphases on power and conflict, accountability and responsibility, and on modifying the techno-structural aspects of the school. Also, and perhaps most importantly from my point of view, OD practitioners and researchers should create strategies for bringing parents, students, and educators into joint decision making around educational alternatives. Finally, the need is great for more cadres of internal OD specialists in school districts that are linked together into self-renewing regional networks.